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SICILIAN SEPARATISM WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO THE REPORT OF LORD RENNELL OF RODD

19 November 1943

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The subject of Sicilian separatism forms such an important part of our American or of Allied military and political policy with respect to Europe as well as Italy, that some of its significant aspects deserve immediate attention.

The word "separatism" has been and is being used to denote a variety of things. At first, one would suppose that it referred to Sicily's complete political separation from the united Italian state, of which Sicily has been an integral part since that state was established.

There has been a distinct tendency, however, to use the word "separatism" loosely and improperly, in connection with the actual or possible development of Sicilian movements aiming, for instance, towards (a) the recognition or flowering of a regional way of life or culture (regionalism); or (b) a measure of administrative autonomy, "home rule" or relative independence within the framework of a unitary or federal Italian kingdom or republic.

The use of the word "separatism" to signify political separation, cultural regionalism or administrative autonomy has, of course, often led to confusion. While confusion might disturb one's intellectual sense of order and logic, it has, in the field of politics, some notable virtues, especially for those who have certain well-defined aims, and the power to promote and achieve those aims. Thus, those who envisage Sicily's political separation from Italy could make it appear, wittingly or unwittingly, that they have the support of Sicilians who are interested in cultural regionalism, administrative autonomy or "home rule."

Our principal concern in this memorandum is Sicilian separatism, meaning Sicily's complete political separation from the or a united Italian state; separation which might take several forms, such as complete independence or dependence on a non-Italian power in the guise of a protectorate, a mandate, or a dominion.

From an Italian and non-Italian point of view, Sicilian separatism has loomed up as an issue only recently, that is, since Italy's entrance into the war in June 1940 and more particularly since AMG assumed power in Sicily in July 1943.

The issue is probably more the creation of non-Italian than of Italian (or Sicilian) influences. In non-Italian quarters, there has developed a considerable current of opinion — some of it expressed orally — to the effect that it might be necessary or desirable, for one reason or another, to promote the dismemberment of Italy, as is evidenced by the following examples: Yugoslavs in England and in this country have claimed that a just post-war settlement should sanction the annexation of Trieste to Yugoslavia; the editor of the English periodical Nineteenth Century and After (November 1942), speaking of the balance of power and the demands of British Mediterranean strategy, declared that Italy must cede Istria (with Trieste) to Yugoslavia and must surrender the island of Pantelleria (like Sicily, an integral part of Italy) for strategic reasons; Commander Stephen King-Hall, a member of the British Parliament, stated, in November 1942, that if Italy broke away from Hitler, the United Nations would respect the territorial integrity of the mainland of Italy, with her frontiers as of 1914, meaning, by the mainland, Italy without such islands as Sicily and Sardinia; remarks

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and queries have been made, in the press and in the House of Commons, regarding Italy's dismemberment and fears that the British might wish to keep Sicily as a base.

These and other references to the dismemberment of Italy were exploited to gain Italian non-Fascist support for the Fascist war program, and at the present time they are undoubtedly disturbing those Italians who are unquestionably pro-American or pro-Ally.

In the light of the above references to the dismemberment of Italy, it is easy to understand the concern over the possible complete separation of Sicily from the rest of Italy.

We have noted the relative recency of Sicilian separatism as an issue. It is of the utmost importance to bear this in mind in order to understand certain attempts, at once misleading, confusing and dangerous, to construct an historical basis for the so-called contemporary or present-day Sicilian separatist movement.

For the sake of clarity in this discussion, the history of Sicily may be divided into two parts: the first, before, and the second, after the achievement of Italian political unity -- including Sicily, of course -- in 1861 or 1870. The united Kingdom of Italy was proclaimed in 1861; Rome was annexed in 1870; either date may be used to mark the achievement of Italian unity.

Perhaps we should dismiss as irrelevant all references to so-called separatist currents in Sicily before 1870. Those currents were

related to problems wholly distinct from the problem of so-called Sicilian separatism within the framework of the united Italian state.

Lord Rennell of Rodd, in his report of August 14, 1943, on AMG in Sicily, 1/ says:

"The Sicilian Separatist movement is of course not a new element in Italian politics. Sicily was, after all, not 100 years ago independent of the rest of Italy as part of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies."

Such statements as these have an extremely slight or no real bearing on the contemporary issue of separatism or dismemberment. Otherwise we would have to take into account not only the history of Sicily since ancient times, but also the history of several, not to say numerous, parts of Italy since the fall of the Roman Empire, parts which were, for considerable periods of time and even "not 100 years ago", quite independent of one another and of the "rest of Italy." We can hardly make much progress in handling the Italian problem if we begin to cite pre-1870 political tendencies -- many of which lasted, in one form or another, for centuries -- as the basis for evaluating present-day political currents in Italy.

It would be more profitable to consider attempts to construct an historical basis for a Sicilian separatist movement since Italy's political unification.

1/ All quotations and citations from Lord Rennell in this memorandum are from his report of August 14, 1943.

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Lord Rennell states that during the period of the first fifty years of Italian Independence (read unity) since 1870, "there was a recrudescence of separatism under leaders some of whom are still alive and in Sicily today."

Since Lord Rennell's language is sometimes as vague as it is informal, it is often not easy to reduce his words to a precise meaning.

When he speaks of the recrudescence of separatism after 1870, he presumably means the recrudescence of the type of separatism allegedly existing before 1870, but as we have already suggested, there is not merely one type of separatism; rather, there are at least two types of separatism, one, pre-1870, the other, post-1870.

The assertion that there was separatism after 1870 is open to serious question and should be treated as an allegation, not as a statement of fact. It would be infinitely more difficult to prove than to disprove that assertion.

One would have to search into the rather obscure recesses of Sicilian history from 1870 to 1940 or 1943 -- perhaps in vain or with little result -- in order to find what could reasonably be called anything resembling a serious or important separatist movement or party.

Lord Rennell himself tells us that before Operation Husky, he tried to obtain some data on the Sicilian separatist movement from special sources, having suspected its existence from his previous knowledge of Italy, but he obtained no sort of inkling or hint of such a movement.

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This would seem to indicate that it was at least not easy to obtain data on Sicilian separatism before Operation Husky, even from special sources.

This is not the place to enter into a disquisition regarding the Italian and national viewpoint characterizing the participation of Sicilians in Italian politics since 1870, but it is worthy of note that the Sicilians Crispi and Di Rudinì were Prime Ministers of Italy in the late nineteenth century, that the Sicilian Marquis Di San Giuliano was the Foreign Minister of Italy at the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, that the Sicilian Orlando (who is still living) was Prime Minister of Italy during the most decisive period of the First World War, that the Sicilian priest, Don Luigi Sturzo (who is still living) was the founder, in 1919, of the nationally-based Italian Catholic political party (Partito Popolare Italiano), one of the most powerful political mass movements in the history of united Italy.

Other names could easily be added.

On the other hand, we find it difficult even to guess the names of leaders, "still alive and in Sicily today", under whom, according to Lord Rennell, there was a recrudescence of separatism, and, while we are on the subject, we venture to add that we cannot recall the name of a single Sicilian political figure of respectable stature who was associated with a separatist movement. Perhaps Lord Rennell could be asked to furnish the names of the leaders to whom he refers.

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To be sure, there may have been some persons, scattered here and there in Sicily, who, peacefully and without causing a political stir, indulged in sentimental dreams of a far-gone semi-independent Sicily, just as there were, in recent times, persons in the United States who regretted the break with England at the time of the American Revolution or the American territorial unity resulting from or "imposed" by our Civil War, persons in Scotland who deplored the need for unity with or "subjugation" to England, persons in England and Scotland who yearned for the restoration of the Stuarts, persons in Rome who hoped that Rome — all of it — could again become a Papal state, persons in Naples who bemoaned the disappearance of the Bourbons, and so on.

In the case of Sicily, those who speak of a separatist movement since 1870 have the burden of proving their assertion.

From what has been said, it would seem to be clear that there is little or no basis for the contention that Sicilian separatism has anything approaching an historical background since 1870.

Turning to the actual or alleged evidence concerning a Sicilian separatist movement since AMG assumed power in Sicily in July 1943, we find that although it is uneven in quality, it is sufficient to make the separatist issue a serious one, for us as well as for the Italians (including the Sicilians).

In view of Lord Rennell's commanding position in Sicily, a position which gives him special opportunities not only to observe but also to create or foster Sicilian political movements, we shall devote

most of our attention to his observations on the subject of separatism.

Although Lord Rennell tried, before Operation Husky, to obtain some data on the Sicilian separatist movement from special sources and although he obtained no sort of inkling or hint of such a movement, he was apparently impressed, after arriving in Sicily, with the evidence concerning the movement.

He tells us that "from the first moment of our landing when my officers took charge, they have been assailed by Sicilian Separatism and expressions of the hope of people of all classes and all over the island that the liberating mission of the Allies involved the separation of Sicily from Italy."

Here again, we are confronted with an important declaration, which, in all candor and in the absence of corroborative evidence, may well be considered a mere allegation, not a statement of fact, to be regarded as true simply because of the authority of its author.

It is extremely doubtful that expressions of people of <u>all</u> classes and <u>all over</u> the island were characterized by the hope that the liberating mission of the Allies <u>involved the separation of Sicily from Italy</u>.

Further on, Lord Rennell, after saying that the separatist movement is not a new element in Italian politics, speaks again of the Allied liberating mission in the following language:

"It is therefore not surprising that the advent of the Allied Armies with a swirl of propaganda announcing that they were liberating

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the people of Sicily should have given impetus to the Separatist idea which now claims Allied support from these promises of liberation and from the terms of these Allied announcements which specifically refer to the freedom of people to choose their own form of government."

Unless we are sadly mistaken, Allied propaganda to Italy made it clear that our aim was to liberate Italy (including Sicily) from Fascism and Nazism. Allied appeals, addressed specifically to Sicily because we were planning the invasion of Sicily, also made clear that aim, just as current or contemplated Allied appeals intended for Lombardy, Genoa or Florence are characterized by that aim. At no time, apparently, did Allied propaganda to Sicily promise or even allude to the idea that our liberating mission meant the liberation of Sicily from Italy.

It might be well in this connection to recall the following details. An Associated Press despatch, published in this country on July 17, 1943, attributed this statement to the AMG administration: "Today the Stars and Stripes and the Union Jack fly side by side at every AMGOT headquarters in Sicily. They will be flown together as symbols of the Allied military government's supreme authority until the Allied forces attain their final objective: to liberate the Italians." (italics ours). Lt. Gen. G. S. Patton declared in a statement for the first issue of Sicilia Liberata (August 6, 1943), a daily published in Palermo with the permission or under the auspices of AMG: "The purpose of the Americans... is not to enslave but to liberate those peoples of the world who have

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suffered for twenty years under the malign influence of Fascism and Nazism,... The purpose of America is to relentlessly press on and ruthlessly destroy Fascism and Nazism wherever it is found." (Italics ours)

If our view of Allied propaganda is correct, it is difficult to believe that a responsible and representative body of Sicilians of all classes and all over the island could have thought that it involved the separation of Sicily from Italy. It is equally, if not more, difficult, to believe that Allied announcements specifically referring to the freedom of people to choose their own form of government were interpreted by a responsible and representative body of Sicilians of all classes and all over the island to mean that the people of Sicily, as distinguished from and independently of the people of other parts of Italy, were free to choose a form of government for themselves, in Sicily. And it would be difficult to believe that similar announcements addressed, let us say, to the people of Marseilles, of Brittany or of Paris, would be interpreted by a responsible and representative body of people in these places to mean that the people of each of these places, as distinguished from and independently of the people of other parts of France, would be free to choose their own form of government.

It is quite possible, of course, that some Sicilians may have been confused by the "swirl" of Allied propaganda, and that some of them, allegedly separatists, may have read separatism, or encouragement to separatism, into Allied announcements that had nothing to do with separatism.

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Lord Rennell notes the formation in Sicily — after AMG assumed power and despite the ban on political activities — of Communist, Socialist, Democratic-Liberal and Separatist groups. (It is rather strange that no mention is made of Catholic or Christian — Democratic groups.) He observes that "probably all the groups [that is, Communist, Socialist, Democratic — Liberal groups] are also separatist" — a statement which is too vague to warrant analysis and too hazardous to be accepted without scrutiny. We cannot discuss here and at length the background and orientation of these political groups, but in the absence of any real and substantial evidence to the contrary and unless these groups have changed very radically indeed since AMG assumed power in Sicily, it seems certain that in none of them is the separatist idea dominant, or perhaps even prominent or present.

And if we were to take into account the sentiment of Italians born in Sicily and living in non-occupied Italian territory, we would doubtless find it decisively and overwhelmingly, if not almost unanimously, opposed to Sicilian separatism. The sincere, in some ways almost pathetic, demonstration of attachment to the idea of a united Italy (including Sicily) which those Italians have given since our invasion and occupation of Sicily is too eloquent to be overlooked.

Lord Rennell tells us that within a few days of the occupation of Palermo, a Committee for Sicilian Independence was formed, that a manifesto was printed as a handbill, and posters were put up in the streets. According to an Associated Press despatch, dated Palermo,

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July 26, 1943, "forty young Sicilians" called on July 25 to explain a move for Sicilian independence. Herbert L. Matthews, in an article dated Palermo and published in the New York Times on August 22, 1943, says that when the Allies first arrived in Sicily a deputation of "forty men" went to the AMG headquarters and petitioned for an independent Sicily. On all these seemingly important but fragmentary details, we reserve judgement, as we do not have before us copies of the manifesto and posters and the names of the members of the Committee, of the "forty men" or of the "forty young Sicilians."

Lord Rennell writes further with respect to the Sicilian separatist movement: "Among the leaders of the movement are, as might be expected, members of the Tasca family who have always been associated with Sicilian Separatism and have equally always been Anti-Fascist. Finocchiaro-Aprile a pre-Fascist under Secretary of State and a Sicilian by origin is also in the forefront of the movement. He served in Italian pre-Fascist governments in the departments of War and Finance. He is somewhat garrulous and not very outstanding in ability. In addition to these a number of land owners, and the normal type of doctor and lawyer are associated with the movement. I have caused all those of whom I have knowledge to be warned that under Military Government political activities of this nature are not permitted. I have personally warned Alessandro Tasca and Finocchiaro-Aprile. But I do not flatter myself that these warnings will have much effect; from the point of view of the leaders, the moment is clearly not one to be lost if they are to achieve anything."

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Some of these statements call for comment.

The term "members of the Tasca family" is rather vague. The Tasca family in Sicily seems to be reasonably large (there is also a Tasca Lanza family), and it would be helpful to have the names of those members who have "always" been associated with Sicilian separatism, as it would be helpful to have at least some names of the "number of landowners and the normal type of doctor and lawyer."

One prominent Tasca who apparently was not always a separatist, namely, Lucio Tasca, Count of Almerita, a native of Palermo, was appointed Senator of the Kingdom of Italy in 1869. Apparently not always separatist were also certain "Tascas" of Sicily who aided or participated in the Italian national war effort in the First World War. Lord Rennell names Alessandro Tasca (there may be more than one Sicilian by that name), and while it is possible that he is now a separatist leader, it seems certain (unless we have another Alessandro Tasca in mind) that he has not always been a separatist.

The Finocchiaro-Aprile mentioned by Lord Rennell is doubtless, judging from Lord Rennell's description, Andrea Finocchiaro-Aprile, of whom it may be said that, while he might now be a separatist leader, he has not always been a separatist leader, as can be shown, in part, by his own earlier, and outwardly brilliant, political record as a member of the Italian Chamber of Deputies, approximately from 1913 to 1924. There is, incidentally, another Sicilian, Emanuele Finocchiaro-Aprile, an engineer and a former member of the Italian Chamber of Deputies, who,

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though anti-Fascist, is almost certainly not a separatist and who is doubtless now opposing any possible separatist movement, not making the capital mistake of identifying anti-Fascism with separatism.

Lord Rennell refers to a document embodying the program of separatist leaders at Palermo for creating a Sicilian Republican Government etc. It would be of great value to have a copy of this document.

Lord Rennell devotes some attention to the ill-famed Mafia. We cannot discuss his observations on the Mafia in this memorandum, but it is noteworthy that he makes the following hazardous statement: "I would expect the Mafia to be associated with the Sicilian Independence Movement."

Although Lord Rennell rather modestly and disarmingly calls his report a "somewhat superficial review of the political situation", we prefer to regard it as a highly important document, the contents and implications of which deserve the closest study, particularly as they relate to separatism.

In our view, the principal AMG problems in Sicily are political in character. While there is every reason to assume that administrative and technical problems, connected with such matters as food, communications and health, will be efficiently handled by well-equipped men, there is some basis for asking whether we have given sufficient attention to Sicilian political problems and our political policy in Sicily.

Quite frankly, it would be unfortunate if we had to rely on the type of political information embodied in Lord Rennell's report.

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And yet, Lord Rennell's words must undoubtedly carry great weight and have a far-reaching influence.

His remarks on separatism might easily make one think that separatism is a dominant issue in Sicily, that it appears to be an indigenous movement with no encouragement whatever from non-indigenous elements, that, somehow, despite the ban on political activities, certain political tendencies find a way of manifesting themselves while others do not, and that it would be foolish to suppose or suggest that a movement is being conceivably created, fostered or favored by those who apparentl are merely observing it, or perhaps, apparently, even discouraging it.

It seems clear to us that AMG not only dominates Sicily but also holds in its power the political destiny and future of that island.

There is more than plausible ground for believing that if we — the Allies — willed it, we could do almost anything in Sicily, and with excellent prospects of success. We could, if we willed it, even create a separatist and independent Sicily, and without even appearing to be responsible for such a development.

In the light of recent Italian as well as American and Allied political developments, including Italy's co-belligerency status, it would seem that, from an American standpoint, the most enlightened, the most realistic and the most advantageous view that could now be taken with regard to Sicily is to consider the desirability of discontinuing AMG in Sicily at the earliest possible moment, without, of course, sacrificing that measure of access to the island which is necessary for the preservation of our military and political program.

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To conclude, the fundamental question is to determine what our will or policy is or should be, in accordance with our best interests.